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Drive for cityhood gets boost

By Cathy Locke -- Bee Staff Writer - (Published June 3, 2004)

El Dorado Hills cityhood efforts remain on track, thanks to eleventh-hour fund-raising success and an arbitrator's decision to defer some fees for incorporation studies.

In a joint written statement, the El Dorado Hills Incorporation Committee and the El Dorado Local Agency Formation Commission announced that the incorporation committee deposited \$241,000 with LAFCO on May 25 to assure funding for cityhood studies.

The amount of the deposit, determined by retired Judge Terrence M. Finney through a dispute resolution process, was less than the \$360,000 LAFCO had sought and more than the \$130,000 the committee had hoped to pay.

But both sides expressed satisfaction with the judge's decision.

"The project is happening," said Roseanne Chamberlain, executive director of LAFCO, the agency that rules on governmental reorganizations in the county.

Chamberlain said Friday that her staff was working on contracts for environmental and financial studies, in keeping with a time line to place a cityhood measure on the ballot in November 2005.

Norm Rowett, vice chairman of the incorporation committee, said cityhood proponents were buoyed by recent fund-raising success. Within the past few weeks, contributions from the El Dorado Hills community rose from \$100,000 to \$210,000, he said. He credited a \$25,000 grant from the city of Rancho Cordova for priming the pump and encouraging people to support the effort financially.

Rowett said committee members had been on the phone for about three weeks, telling people that this was a critical time for the incorporation effort. Had the committee been unable to make the deposit, the current incorporation bid would have ended. "We were able to convince people of our vision," he said.

He and committee Chairman John Hidahl also have sought contributions from various public agencies. In addition to Rancho Cordova's grant, the El Dorado Irrigation District has agreed to consider a \$25,000 loan, provided an entity can be found to guarantee repayment if the incorporation effort fails.

Rowett also has appeared before the Placerville and South Lake Tahoe city councils, requesting \$10,000 from Placerville and \$15,000 from South Lake Tahoe. Those cities, he said, would realize a significant savings if El Dorado Hills incorporated, because it would reduce their contributions to LAFCO.

Under state law, the county, cities and special districts share the cost of LAFCO operations. A new city would assume a share of those expenses, reducing costs for other entities. Neither city has taken action on the request.

The committee is scheduled to make its pitch Wednesday to the Citrus Heights City Council.

Cityhood proponents will need more money. Finney's order requires the committee to deposit \$40,000 in contingency funds by July 1 and an additional \$40,000 if LAFCO determines that an environmental

impact report is required for incorporation.

The committee has argued that a less extensive environmental study, known as a negative declaration, would be adequate. But in his order, Finney said, "Based on experience, I could not more strongly disagree. It is my opinion that a negative declaration is an invitation to costly and time-delaying litigation."

The committee also challenged LAFCO's rates for staff overhead and other expenses. But Finney said he did not have "the inclination or the authority to demand that LAFCO give any party a discount for services rendered."

About the Writer

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